

Calais Selectboard Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 24, 2016

Unapproved

Present: Selectboard Members Denise Wheeler, John Brabant, Rose Pelchuck, Scott Bassage, Toby Talbot absent.

Others Present: Road Commissioner Alfred Larrabee, Attorney Jim Barlow, Clerk and Treasurer Donna Fitch, Reed Cherington, Kim McKee (Cross VT Trail Assoc.), Geraldine Gilman, Doug Lilley, Nancy Purchase, Richard Purchase, Ed Emmons, Jill Schultz, Will Walters (Hardwick Gazette), Gail Graham, Rachael Bliss, Margaret Bowen, Candi Smith, Curtis Johnson, David Schutz.

Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

● **Review and Approve Minutes:** Scott Bassage moved to approve the minutes of September 26, 2016. Seconded by Denise Wheeler, this motion carried unanimously. Special meeting September 29, 2016: Scott Bassage moved to approve the minutes. Seconded by John Brabant, this motion carried unanimously. Special Meeting Oct 12, 2016: Scott Bassage moved to approve the minutes. Seconded by John Brabant, this motion carried unanimously.

● **Curb Cut - Tim Howe:** The Board decided the curb cut was preexisting and did not need approval from the Board. Donna will return Tim's check.

● **Ratify ROW for Barbara Butler and Charlotte Hanna:** Denise Wheeler reviewed that the Board had considered the Charlotte Hanna request at the September 26th meeting. Rose Pelchuck moved to ratify this request. Seconded by John Brabant, this motion carried. Scott Bassage recused himself from this vote.

John Brabant moved to approve the application from Barbara Butler as submitted. Seconded by Scott Bassage, this motion carried unanimously.

● **Cross Vermont Trail Association presentation of the Winooski Bridge project** (Kim McKee, Board Member): Kim McKee shared a map and explained the project. A grant for the project requires \$250,000 local match; they have raised approximately \$150K to date, with \$99K to go. The City of Montpelier agreed to give \$5K to the project. Neighboring towns are being asked to donate toward the project; the City of Montpelier intends to ask voters to support a per capita donation. East Montpelier is planning similarly. Kim requested an article on the Calais Town Meeting Warning for \$1,607 (\$1 per person based on population). The trails are a gravel surface intended for non-motorized vehicles and activities – walking, biking, hiking, cross country skiing. Cross Vermont Trail Association maintains the trails, working closely with other organizations such as Vermont Youth Conservation.

Kim stated this is a one-time infrastructure request and will not become an ongoing request. VAST would not use this portion of the rail trail, though they do share some other portions.

Reed Cherington stated personally, and not on behalf of the Trails Committee, that he thinks the offer from Montpelier is compelling; he believes there are opportunities for private fundraising in the town of Calais. He stated that since this trail does not go through Calais, he believes the Board might consider pledging a lesser amount than, for instance, East Montpelier.

Geraldine Gilman stated that VAST works to raise its own money and to maintain its own trails. She believes taxpayers should not be asked to support this. John Brabant stated he is in support of putting this on the Town Meeting warning and letting the townspeople decide. Kim was instructed to submit a petition with 68 registered voter signatures (5% of the town's registered voters) and provide a short Warning article by December 2016, in preparation for Town Meeting Day 2017. (The form is available on the Secretary of State's website and in the town office.)

● **Calais Historic Preservation Commission update on Flood Status of our Historic Town Hall:**

David Schutz distributed *Calais Historic Preservation Commission (CHPC) and the Town Hall (2010-2015) Chronology* and discussed the results of the engineering study done on the Town Hall as it relates to floods. David asked the Board to accept the report from the engineer and to accept in principle the intention to pursue Option 5 on the *Alternatives Analysis Summary Matrix, Pekin Brook Flood Study, September 2, 2016*. The proposal includes installing a larger culvert in Gospel Hollow with the old culvert installed up the road near 1567 Kent Hill Road. The CHPC is asking for the Selectboard to financially support the culvert project that is involved in this proposal. Structures grants may be available.

A community member expressed concern about taxes being raised for this project; he does not believe it is a worthwhile project. He believes town meetings should take place at the elementary school. Some discussion followed around the feasibility of preserving the town hall. Scott Bassage explained that the *Pekin Brook Floodplain Mapping and Calais Town Hall Alternatives Analysis, 9-22-16* is available for review on the town web site and in the town office.

● **Selectboard discussion of town accounting and financial responsibilities:** Denise Wheeler stated that the Board has been reviewing the audit report from Fothergill, Segale and Valley, CPA. Donna stated that the audit is available for review by email or in hard copy. She explained that one of the challenges is that the town does not have elected auditors (no one has run for the three positions) and with a small two-person staff it is nearly impossible to implement checks and balances that are recommended best financial practices. One recommendation from the recent audit is that one person who does not have signing rights review financial transactions in the office.

Board members spoke about the desire to hire a bookkeeper to train with Donna Fitch, with the long term vision of hiring or electing a Town Treasurer. Attorney Jim Barlow discussed the process of adopting a charter that would change the Town Treasurer position from being elected by the voters to being hired by the Selectboard. John Brabant expressed discomfort with hiring a bookkeeper with the intention of "grooming" the person for Town Treasurer. He stated that he feels more comfortable posting this position to include people outside of town, and have it be separate from the intention to elect/ appoint/ hire a Town Treasurer.

Discussion followed. Some community members expressed concern over whether the Town Treasurer position, separate from Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk, would be yet

another full time or close to full-time position, and whether this is necessary and financially feasible.

Some discussion followed comparing other nearby towns. The Board agreed that more information is needed to continue to explore this issue. Candi Smith stated that VLCT has information available related to this issue. She offered to help Denise Wheeler gather information for the Board to consider and to share with the community when considering these issues.

John Brabant stated he wants to be sure everyone is treated fairly and even-handedly in the hiring process.

Some discussion followed around the increase in responsibilities and duties at the town office, for example because of state and federal mandates, managing grants, etc.

Denise Wheeler asked the Board members for input about moving forward. John Brabant reviewed: (1) an immediate need to hire bookkeeping help, (2) consideration of a charter. Scott Bassage stated that East Montpelier had a charter committee that worked for over a year; the Board discussed that this issue is not as complicated or involved as those that East Montpelier faced and the aim would be to put it on the March ballot. Attorney Jim Barlow reviewed the perceived advantages/disadvantages:

Advantages:

- Larger pool of potentially qualified persons
- Opportunity to create job description and minimum performance expectations
- Opportunity to select most qualified applicant from the pool (not necessarily the “most popular”)
- A more permanent solution to a potentially recurring problem (currently a 3 year term)
- Takes “luck” out of the equation

Disadvantages:

- Process: getting approval from the legislature
- Any amendments thereafter require going through the lengthy process again
- Timing issue for this year (the charter wouldn’t go into effect until June/July 2017)
- Tradition/ “nice element” to keeping it local, do-it-yourself-government

Candi Smith stated it is very important for the Board to be very clear with the community about the possible time table that was discussed: to hire a bookkeeper very soon, to elect a Town Treasurer on Town Meeting Day, and then to appoint a Town Treasurer at some future date, according to the charter.

John Brabant moved to task Jim Barlow to draft a charter around appointment of Town Treasurer and eliminate the position of town elected auditors, with the goal of having the process move through the legislature in 2017; and to task Denise Wheeler and Candi Smith to collect information about statewide town positions. Seconded by Denise Wheeler, this motion carried unanimously.

Jim Barlow will have a charter draft for the next Selectboard meeting.

● **Armstrong Farm update:** John Brabant stated that he, Stephanie Kaplan and Scott Bassage attended a meeting of the Vermont Land Trust Board. A couple from Plainfield expressed interest in purchasing the farm according to the plan that had been delineated at a previous Board meeting (on July 22, 2016) and that the meeting was very positive. However, there are some land deed complications; he will keep the Board apprised.

● **Curtis Pond Dam proposed community meeting update:** John Brabant reiterated that the town does not own the property, so the Selectboard's involvement in this issue is limited. He had suggested that a Curtis Pond shore homeowners create an association. Some discussion followed around concerns about the dam and the Selectboard's limited ability to address the concerns.

Special Meeting: Denise Wheeler reminded the Board that a special meeting is planned for October 31st at 7:00; an Executive Session will be needed at 6:30 for an interview.

Adjourn/continue meeting: At 9:23, Board members moved by consensus to continue the meeting to Thursday, October 27th at 7:00 for the East Montpelier Fire Department joint Selectboard quarterly review meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary

<http://calaisvermont.gov/>